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SCHEDULING FOR A DIFFERENTIATED READING PROGRAM

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A renewed impetus toward the improvement of reading instruction has been provided in great measure by the nationwide thrust toward educational accountability. Educators have been prompted to seek diverse means for improving reading instruction because of the realization that large numbers of average to high IQ children exhibit a discrepancy between capacity and performance scores. Supplementary instructional programs have been instituted; teacher in-service programs have been provided; paraprofessionals have been employed; teaching methodologies have been varied; learning centers have been constructed; management systems have been implemented; and new textbooks have been adopted. Altering the delivery of instruction, however, has been afforded minor consideration in the quest for improved reading instruction. Varying the delivery of reading instruction is a positive step toward the differentiation of a reading program, because in so doing the individual instructional needs of students can be met more readily. This process can be facilitated directly through the employment of scheduling procedures accompanied by distinct staffing patterns. Limited options have been available to teachers in modifying the delivery of instruction. The choice of instructional alternatives for teachers can be expanded by incorporating the scheduling concept into the reading program.

It has been indicated by evidence accrued from research that a relationship exists between class size and reading achievement, (Frymier, 1961; Balow, 1967; Furno, 1967). Through the use of scheduling procedures, an instructional group can be manipulated so as to reduce considerably the staffing ratio of the group. Specifically, a large reading "class size" can be transformed to accommodate a relatively low ratio of students to staff positions when scheduling techniques are utilized effectively.

The role of the class size variable in scholastic achievement has received voluminous support from research. Olson and McKenna (1975), Glass, Cahen, Smith, and Filby (1979), after examining the numerous class size studies, concluded that the class size ratio is related to a broad range of educational goals and processes as reflected in the generalizations that follow. When teacher-student ratios are reduced:

1. Teachers employ a wider variety of instructional strategies, methods, and learning activities and are more effective with them (Newell, 1943; Richmond, 1955; Whisitt, 1955);
2. Students benefit from more individualized instruction (Hare, 1962; Danowski, 1965; Edwards, 1969; Katz, 1973);
3. Students engage in more creative and divergent thinking processes (Otte, 1966; Olson, 1970);
4. Students learn how to function more effectively as members and leaders of groups of varying sizes and purposes (Brown, 1965; Olson, 1970, 1971);
5. Students develop better human relations and have greater regard for others (Shane, 1961; Applegate, 1969; Bolander, 1973);
6. Students learn the basic skills more thoroughly and master more subject matter content (Balow, 1967; Burno, 1967; Walberg, 1974);
7. Classroom management and discipline are improved (Richmond, 1955; Hubbard, 1963; Cannon, 1966);
8. Teacher attitudes and morale are more positive (Hubbard, 1963; Cannon, 1966);
9. Student attitudes and perceptions are more positive (Eash, 1964; Applegate, 1969; Bolander, 1973).

The importance of class size reduction to the quality of education is readily discernible from an examination of research studies wherein class size was utilized as the independent variable. It appears reasonable to assume that major consideration should be given to the employment of scheduling procedures in which class size can be manipulated so as to accommodate the unique requirements of varied instructional strategies and alternate styles of educational activity. Educators are faced with the problem of achieving flexibility when burdened with teacher-student ratios of one to twenty-five or one to thirty. Flexibility is desirable because the more productive styles of educational activity—small group work, individual work, discussion, laboratory work, pupil report, and demonstration—are more likely to occur in groups with teacher-student ratios of one to five through one to fifteen (Olson, 1971). The authors contend that basic scheduling concepts can be incorporated into a reading program so as to reduce considerably the class size ratio and, thereby, facilitate altering the delivery of reading instruction.

When small teacher-student ratios are desirable, the reading class size ratio may be manipulated so that the number of students for which a teacher is responsible during critical instructional periods is reduced by approximately fifty percent. This reduction may be accomplished through the use of parallel scheduling which involves scheduling small reading groups parallel to a large group activity, and opposite from Extension Center (enrichment) activities. For illustrative purposes, the reader is referred to Schedule Models 1, 2, and 3, (page 41).

Directed Reading Group (DRG) and Reading Skill Group (RSG) are references to students who have been grouped according to common instructional needs. A DRG is composed of students who have been placed in

a particular level of a basal textbook series. For example, in Schedule Model 1, students in DRG-5 have been grouped for instruction because they share a broad spectrum of instructional needs which are met sequentially in a particular level of a commercial basal reader program. Language Experience Activities as well as other reading programs and approaches in which small student groups are required can be accomplished by the DRG grouping pattern. An RSG is composed of students who have been placed in a temporary skills group according to a specific instructional need. In Schedule Model 2, students in RSG-8 have been grouped for instruction because they need more experience in identifying word affixes. The RSG grouping pattern is well suited to a skills oriented approach to the teaching of reading similar to the approach utilized in commercial reading management systems.

Language Arts Group (LAG) is a reference to a group of students formed by combining two DRG's or two RSG's. These students are grouped heterogeneously for varied language arts activities. For example, in Schedule Model 3, students in LAG 1, 7 may be scheduled to engage in creative writing activities. Teacher A meets with small groups of students (RSG 1; RSG 7) separately for two periods of time in the block and meets with the two small groups combined (LAG 1, 7) for one period of time in the block. Through this scheduling arrangement, each teacher is freed from the burden of having to supervise one or more groups of students while attempting to direct a small, specific reading group activity.

Students in the Extension Center are provided with opportunities for the reinforcement, extension, and application of those skills which have been taught in skills groups. Students are encouraged to select experiences of individual interest, and they receive minimal teacher guidance during this activity period.

By including the Extension Center concept in scheduling, problems relative to providing services to students qualifying for special services such as Title I, learning disabilities, and oral language remediation often can be managed. Students needing special services may receive assistance during the Extension Center period. In some cases, such as Title I, it may be best for the special service to be provided in the Extension Center area. Such a plan helps reduce the isolation of students receiving such services. Children qualifying for special services may benefit from this type of schedule by not having to be absent from teacher directed activities such as art, music, or social studies.

The Extension Center is usually staffed by one professional teacher who is assisted by teacher aides, parent volunteers, student tutors, interns, or other support personnel. The Extension Center is a room or area containing games, learning centers, interest centers, learning modules, manipulative aids, and other types of reinforcement materials which are multi-level and multi-media. It is an organized "pooled" resource area to which all teachers contribute. Major pieces of audio-visual equipment are located in the Extension Center, thus making readily accessible not only content but also

multi-media materials to all teachers and students, within scheduling constraints.

Flexibility is paramount to the parallel scheduling concept. Through parallel scheduling, the use of diverse instructional strategies is facilitated because personal teaching philosophies can be honored and individual teacher strengths can be capitalized upon. For example, in Schedule Model 1, Teacher A engages students in language experience activities (LEA) when meeting with DRG's because she is philosophically attuned to the tenets of LEA, and conducts this type of reading activity with ease when teaching beginning readers and/or pupils with reading difficulties. Teacher D provides Directed Reading Thinking Activities, using a basal reader, when meeting with DRG's because he is committed to an independent problem solving approach to reading instruction in which the purposes for reading are set by the students. Teacher E prepares teacher-directed reading lessons for students in DRG's because pedagogically she favors a structured skills approach to the teaching of reading and functions best in this type of teacher role.

Student needs as well as teacher preferences are accommodated by parallel scheduling. For example, in Schedule Model 1, students experiencing difficulty in learning to read through the traditional skills approach are assigned to DRG's 1 and 2, instructed by Teacher A who employs LEA. Pupils exhibiting a high degree of distractability and dependence are assigned to DRG's 9 and 10, instructed by Teacher E who provides a structured learning environment accompanied by direct supervision. In addition, when students in DRG's 9 and 10 require a self-contained setting, they remain with Teacher E for the duration of a complete block of time while students assigned to the other DRG's continue with the program as shown.

The implementation of a management system is greatly facilitated by the use of parallel scheduling. In point of illustration, Schedule Model 2 is employed by a school in which a reading management system has been adopted to assist teachers in the continuous process of identifying exactly what reading skills each student has, the degree to which he has mastered them, and at the same time identifying those skills in which the student is deficient. RSG's are formed by use of the criterion-referenced instruments which accompanied the commercially prepared management system. Group composition is temporary because students assigned to a RSG may work in this group from several days to several weeks before being assigned to a different RSG according to level of individual progress, rate of learning, and evolving instructional need. A multitude of materials is used by teachers in developing the particular skill(s) being emphasized in each RSG. In order to facilitate material retrieval, all reading materials (packaged, boxed, bound, regardless of publisher and/or program), are drawn together and organized with respect to the skills identified in the continua set forth by the management system. Certain materials from this collection are housed in the Extension Center in order to serve as reinforcement activities for select students.

Staffing patterns within the parallel schedule are subject to discriminant manipulation. In the assignment of consecutive RSG's to teachers, consideration should be devoted to reading group composition in terms of student level of performance as well as to teacher expertise. For example, in Schedule Model 2, RSG's 1 and 2 are composed of students reading below grade level. Gradations of reading performance increase so that RSG's 11 and 12 are composed of students reading above grade level. Lower level groups are composed of fewer students than are higher level groups. Teacher A is assigned RSG 1 during first period, and RSG 12 during second period. Teacher A is thus enabled to instruct a dependent (RSG 1) and a relatively independent (RSG 12) group of students in succession. In addition, Teacher A instructs students with varying capabilities concurrently during third period when RSG's 1 and 12 are combined to form LAG 1, 12.

It is instructive to note that in Schedule Model 1, Teacher A has been assigned to instruct the lowest level reading group (RSG 1) and the highest level reading group (RSG 12). In contrast, Teacher F has been assigned to instruct the two mid-level reading groups (RSG 6 and RSG 7) which are similar with respect to level of student performance. It appears advisable to assign a highly experienced, effective teacher to the role of Teacher F. Schedule Model 3 is suggested for utilization in a reading program staffed by teachers who prefer to instruct individual group and group combinations that are less diverse in terms of student level of performance.

The scheduling procedures which have been presented are designed to facilitate the delivery of instruction and to promote the formation of a differentiated reading program. Similar schedules can be designed to suit unique program needs by employing the basic principles of parallel scheduling used in the construction of the Schedule Models which have been presented. Scheduling procedures accompanied by distinct staffing patterns are crucial to the successful operation of a differentiated instructional program. The school principal most likely will fulfill the leadership role in extending to teachers and support staff a basic pattern of organization. No single scheduling plan is ideal, nor is there a single scheduling plan that can be constructed to accommodate all types of multi-school programs. Finally, it must be recognized that no single scheduling plan should remain in effect beyond its capacity to endure flexibility. As teachers develop greater expertise and as students develop greater independence, the scheduling plan will require alteration.

Schedule Model 1

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>*I</i>	<i>*II</i>	<i>*III</i>
A	**DRG 1	DRG 2	***LAG 1, 2
B	DRG 3	LAG 3, 4	DRG 4
C	LAG 5, 6	DRG 5	DRG 6
D	DRG 7	DRG 8	LAG 7, 8
E	DRG 9	LAG 9, 10	DRG 10
F	LAG 11, 12	DRG 11	DRG 12

Extension Center Activities

G	DRG's	DRG's	DRG's
2 Aides	2, 4, 8, 10	1, 6, 7, 12	3, 5, 9, 11

*I, II, III—periods of time (usually at least 40 minutes)

**DRG — Directed Reading Group

***LAG — Language Arts Group

Schedule Model 2

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>*I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>
A	DRG 1	RSG 12	LAG 1, 12
B	RSG 2	LAG 2, 11	RSG 11
C	LAG 3, 10	RSG 3	RSG 10
D	RSG 4	RSG 9	LAG 4, 9
E	RSG 5	LAG 5, 8	RSG 8
F	LAG 6, 7	RSG 6	RSG 7

Extension Center Activities

G	RSG's	RSG's	RSG's
2 Aides	8, 9, 11, 12	1, 4, 7, 10	2, 3, 5, 6

*I, II, III—periods of time

**RGS — Reading Skill Group

***LAG — Language Arts Group

Schedule Model 3

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>*I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>
A	RSG 1	RSG 7	LAG 1, 7
B	RSG 2	LAG 2, 8	RSG 8
C	LAG 3, 9	RSG 3	RSG 9
D	RSG 4	RSG 10	LAG 4, 10
E	RSG 5	LAG 5, 11	RSG 11
F	LAG 6, 12	RSG 6	RSG 12

Extension Center Activities

G	RSG's	RSG's	RSG's
2 Aides	7, 8, 10, 11	1, 4, 9, 12	2, 3, 5, 6

*I, II, III—periods of time

**RSG — Reading Skill Group

***LAG — Language Arts Group

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